

WILL BEAUTY SAVE FROM THE ELECTRIC CHAIR MOTHER ACCUSED OF SLAYING ROUGH WOOER

MANY JURORS BALK AT DOOMING COMELY SLAYER OF SUITOR

Mrs. Josephine Pennelli Ragona Testifies That She Shot and Killed Frank Iucalano Who Tried to Make Her Lead a Life of Shame—Victim's Mother in Court Openly Makes the Sign of the Vendetta.

NEW YORK, Dec. 31.

WILL her beauty save Mrs. Josephine Pennelli Ragona from the electric chair, if no other factor comes to her rescue? Will the young matron's handsome features and tragic circumstances of the romance that led to the murder of Frank Iucalano save her three children from being made orphans by the State?

Those are the questions arresting the thoughts of persons who have watched the trend of the spectacular trial in general sessions before Judge Crain in which, during the week, the sensational testimony and startling incidents of the trial seemed of no greater importance than the defendant's attitude.

That her personality is no small factor in her fate was emphatically evidenced when the State and the defense set about securing a jury to try the twenty-one-year-old defendant.

The childish beauty of the woman accused of murder so impressed the talesmen that of the special panel called the first fourteen frankly declared they would make poor jurors. They did not offer the usual excuses of business pressure or illness at home. But they quite candidly swore they were certain they would hesitate to find Mrs. Ragona guilty, whatever the evidence against her, if such a verdict were to send her to the electric chair. They made no effort to conceal that her beauty and personality had charmed them into prejudice in her favor that no evidence could sway.

And throughout the course of the trial the eyes of men and women alike have been riveted on her features, in questioning wonder as to whether one of such attracting mien could be guilty of a heinous offense. Her sympathizers have been numerous and there have been times when it seemed that evidence bearing out that she shot in self-defense would have been received with applause had courtroom decorum permitted.

Not a few prominent women have watched the progress of the case. Every day Mrs. Otto H. Kahn has been among the spectators. The banker's wife explained:

"My interest is that of a curious woman at the trial of another woman."

Not a day has passed without its startling spectacle, for the Italian impulsive nature has time and again given display in emotional gesture and exclamation by witnesses and defendant.

THREE UNHAPPY BABES.

In brief, it is charged that on October 14, 1920, Mrs. Ragona shot to death Frank Iucalano, a rejected suitor, in Second avenue, near 116th street. If the State succeeds in convicting her there will be three motherless children, eventually, should the electric chair carry out sentence, in the Ragona home at 318 East 104th street. These are Kathryn, four; Millie, three; Ira, two—all too young to know why Mamma is away so long and why they must go away downtown to the murky building of towers if they wish to embrace and kiss their "Mamma."

Perhaps some thought of these three youngsters was in the minds of the fourteen talesmen who professed inability to judge truly. That though surely has been ever in the minds of spectators at the trial.

In August of 1920, Mrs. Ragona's husband was in Baltimore, working and sending each week all he could spare to his wife and three children. During the period of his absence his wife and Iucalano met frequently. When the husband returned Iucalano persisted in his attentions. Mrs. Ragona tried to shake him off. The murder followed.

The testimony conflicts as to the incidents preceding the shooting. This conflicting testimony has been the occasion of outbursts of display, the defendant herself at one point declaring in high-pitched tones that a witness was lying.

SIGNAL OF VENDETTA.

Probably the most dramatic touch of the trial was that given by aged Mrs. Marie Iucalano, mother of the dead man. As the old woman slowly advanced to the stand, a picture of distinctive type, with her head bared and her shoulders draped with a long black shawl, she turned quickly.

With a defiant glare she signalled to the defendant the Sicilian oath of vengeance. That signal has been seen before in the Criminal Courts building. It was made by a spectator to a witness on the stand in the trial a few years ago of Michael Rofrano. On that occasion the witness paled and collapsed and the

FOUR UNHAPPY PAWNS OF FATE



Mrs. Josephine Pennelli Ragona and her three babies, who will be left motherless if their beautiful parent is convicted of the murder of Frank Iucalano, who she claims "hounded her" during her husband's absence.

trial was interrupted for several minutes.

The aged woman held up her right hand in an attitude of taking a vow she bent the second knuckle of the first finger of her left hand and placed it to her teeth.

In the Rofrano trial the man to whom such signal of vengeance was vowed flinched. In his trial the defendant to whom it was given also quailed, for among Italians there is no threat more dire.

She paled, leaned heavily on Miss Helen Wassman, of her counsel, and clutched at the table. The courtroom was tense and silent. Attendants caught the significance of the old woman's move. Judge Crain caught it, too. He admonished the witness and reassured the defendant. The old woman stepped to the stand, muttering:

"She took my boy from me."

She testified that Mrs. Ragona and others of her family frequently visited her son and herself at their home at 325 East One Hundred and Fifth street in the spring of 1920. In the summer of that year, she swore, the defendant and her son went to the country together.

She testified that on their return Mrs. Ragona and her three children came to live with her and her son. She went on:

"I warned her against what she was doing and told her she should stay with her husband and her three babies."

THE LINE OF DEFENSE.

Then came, on cross-examination by Newman Levy, disclosure of what the defense would center on. He asked:

"Is it not a fact that Frank quarreled with Josephine because she would not go on the streets? Did

he not say to her, 'You are pretty and can make from \$15 to \$20 a day on the streets?'"

At the counsel table the defendant bowed her head in her hands. On the witness stand the aged woman flared indignantly. She rose to her full height, thrust a rosary on high and shrieked:

"No! I swear on this holy crucifix, no!"

Mrs. Iucalano admitted she saw her husband strike Mrs. Ragona.

Then came the State's star witness, Mrs. Maria Di Mona, of 2042 Second avenue. She testified that when loaning out of the fourth-story window of that address she heard Iucalano and the defendant arguing in the street. Mrs. Ragona, she said, threatened to kill Iucalano unless he agreed to marry her. She said he refused and entered a bakery. Shortly after, went on the

witness, he came out and Mrs. Ragona, from a hallway, shot him dead.

This testimony was challenged, the defense contending that from the fourth story the woman could not have heard what was said in the street. Mrs. Di Mona admitted that Mrs. Ragona was out of her sight at the time of the shooting.

Jose Miller, a soldier, testified he took a revolver from Mrs. Ragona's hand a moment after he heard a report, and saw a man lying dead on the sidewalk.

That about wound up the prosecution. The defense began its case and it began with a dramatic strength that reached its sensational climax when Mrs. Ragona herself related that she had been hounded by Iucalano to a point that rendered her desperate.

defendant, John Daquino, a witness who had volunteered to testify as to what he saw, after reading of the trial in the papers and seeing pictures of the children, said:

"This is the woman I heard Iucalano threaten. When I came up they were standing at a curb. He was shaking a fist in her face. He was saying, 'If you say no, I will kill you.'"

Then came another melodrama. Mrs. Mary Grafflinia, sister of the defendant, testified:

"I heard screams in the street on August 14 or 15. I saw my sister running from the hallway at 325 East One Hundred and Fifth street. Her dress was torn. Iucalano was behind her, with a revolver. They ran into the yard. I followed. I took hold of her. She said, 'He wants to put me on the streets.' I turned to him and said, 'You miserable one.'"

"He shouted at me, 'Shut up, or I will kill you, too!' He began beating my sister with a broomstick. We took it away from him. That night my sister slept in my home. Later I met Iucalano. She had said she would not go back with him because she was afraid he would kill her. I told him that. He said, 'You must put her out. When she has no place to go she will come back to me. If you don't, I will come up there and kill your whole family.'"

Mrs. Ragona came to the stand in her own behalf, low-spoken, shy, but earnest in every syllable. She was married in 1916 to John Ragona, when she was only fifteen, she recalled. Their first child came in December of that year. Two weeks later, while her husband was at work, Iucalano came to her bedside. He demanded:

"How could such a nice young girl marry an old man like your husband?"

In his hand was a stiletto. The woman shrieked and struggled with him. She was slashed on the leg. Iucalano fled. Time and again

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ECSTASY AND GRIEF.

There were other letters that told of the ecstasy of her love and the grief of their separation. In some she greets him as "Darling Heart," and in others as "Sweetheart." And she signs herself "Your Madalynne," and "Your Love Bird" and "Your wife, Mrs. J. Belton Kennedy."

One of them, written shortly after her marriage to Obenchain, says: "It is such torture. How I wish I might go back to the time when we first planned about being married. As we look back now, how easy it all seems—eternal happiness at our very fingertips, and then chaos—black, terrible chaos—with everyone attempting to tear our love into shreds."

"Oh, dear God, please make things so my Belton and I can be together!"

"So many times I can feel your dear, precious arms around me and hear you telling me your love, and the broken fragments of my heart throbbing until it seems as if the pain of longing for you will kill me. Can't any one understand except ourselves how great is our love?"

"What is there to life except to be with one you love? We are here today—gone tomorrow."

"ONE OF US MAY BE GONE."

"The days fly by, never to return. The wonderful days of youth are ended all too soon. Must we patiently sit and wait? No Belton!"

"Don't let the conventions of the earth deny us happiness. Maybe a month, a year, one of us may be

gone. Who knows what a day will bring? As God is my Judge, we can't be wrong if we steal away and rest. I am so weary now, Belton, so weary."

"Hold me close to your heart always and let me whisper my love to you over and over. You are the wonder flower of the passions of my life. In your heart, in your eyes, through your lips I have felt the bliss of a miraculous love, and have been exalted above the world. I tremble at the consciousness of having been loved by you so completely."

Then there was written by Mrs. Obenchain, the State has tried to show by introducing such a missive, a letter saying:

"Little did I realize that man-made laws could keep you from me. Some day, though, we will be together. Every one is against us, no one with us."

"Do you think I could ever lose faith in you? Only God and you have the power to take away my faith. This Hell now seems to be more than I can live through. Good night, my own. There are no words to tell how much I love you."

"UNWORTHY," SHE WROTE.

When Mrs. Obenchain went to Evanston, Ill., to divorce her husband she wrote to Kennedy in Los Angeles:

"He has consented to let me go. With all my weariness I am so happy. My love, I am so happy."

A few days later she wrote Kennedy:

"I should have been big enough and honorable enough to have played square after I married. Mr. C. is so honorable. He has done more for me than any one else would. I am unworthy of him. I should have paid my bargain with him, but I listened to you. You love words held me, not your deeds."

"Why couldn't you have let me go to him instead of holding me to your arms and asking me to divorce my husband? My God, Belton, can any man in the world do the way you have and love a woman? I never want to marry you unless you love me. It must be the truth now or nothing. If you aren't here by January 15 I will go back to Mr. C."

There followed letters in which Mrs. Obenchain pleaded for return of her letters to Belton. In one she called him coward. In another she wrote:

"Belton, Belton, I have much to answer for, but I would not change places with you. Do not come here. I will never marry you. A few weeks and I shall go away where you will never find me. God be good to you."

The letters from Kennedy to Mrs. Obenchain have not yet been read into the record, though they have been marked in evidence. Altogether, the letters so marked total fifty-two.

ATOM MYSTERIOUSLY WRITES ITS SIGNATURE

Scientist Finds Methods of Compelling Minute Particles to Reveal Identity—Spectrometer Makes Delicate Measurement of Atomic Arrangements and Gives Light on Structure of Dyes and Explosives.

ATOMS so small that 432 millions would be required to bridge a half-penny piece made visible by means of large models during a lecture by Prof. Sir William Bragg, of University College, to the Physical Society at South Kensington, London, England.

The models resembled fruit-like clusters of brilliantly colored balls, and the professor's table was like a stall at an horticultural show. Prof. Bragg was lecturing on the atomic structure of organic crystals, and the clusters represented accurate scale models of the arrangements of atoms in crystal cells.

These cells, which each contain numbers of solid atoms, are so minute that it would take millions of millions of them to build up a heap the bulk of a pin's head. In spite of this, a method has been devised which enables the size of these cells to be measured accurately, while it also enables a determination to be made of the size and arrangement of the atoms that make up their structure.

Until recently investigators have confined their attention to the simpler inorganic substances, but the lecturer described a new advance that he is making in the study of complex organic substances. These substances are, in general, of great importance to the community, for not only are they the basis of the structures of organic life, but they form the essential components of such things as dyes and explosives. Deeper insight into their structure is bound to have far-reaching effects.

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